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FOR ACTION

COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY NOTE**

Dominican Republic

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country programme strategy note for the Dominican Republic for a programme of cooperation for the period 1997 to 2001.

Infant and child mortality rates have decreased significantly since 1990. Given these trends, the Dominican Republic should be able to meet the World Summit for Children mortality reduction goals by the year 2000. Notable progress also has been made towards the attainment of some of the mid-decade and decade goals, including adoption of a national plan of action (NPA) for children, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, eradication of polio, increased and sustained immunization coverage, promotion of breast-feeding and improvement in hospital maternal services, and micronutrient supplementation.

Lessons from the current programme have shown that it is important that the Convention be built into the overall country programme strategy, that a more developed communication and mobilization strategy is required for mobilizing additional resources for meeting the NPA goals; and that all of these efforts should be linked to the ongoing national social planning and reform process.

The proposed programme strategy has been developed within the context of the ongoing social reform process and the Social Development Plan. Experience has shown the importance of involving partners in processes that build knowledge and skills and, equally important, commitment to putting poor women and children high on the social agenda. Political will and resource support, in addition to effective alliances among government, civil society and other country programme partners, could strengthen the sustainability of gains and achievement of the NPA goals.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1996.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Progress is being made towards the attainment of the mid-decade and decade goals, including adoption of a national plan of action (NPA) for children; ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the eradication of polio; sustained immunization coverage of over 80 per cent for all antigens except tuberculosis; a reduction in mortality due to tetanus and measles; increased use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT); the certification of five Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) hospitals; and the passage of laws on the protection of children and breast-feeding. Coverage of primary education has increased. Monitoring of the goals, however, needs to be strengthened.

2. With major efforts, many NPA goals, such as the infant and under-five mortality reduction goals, could be achieved by the year 2000. Sustainability of these goals, however, would require higher equity and efficiency in the use of public resources, and stronger partnerships between civil society and Government. The Government's proposed Social Development Plan (SDP) to unite various social sector plans would help to achieve the goals.

3. Between 1990-1994, infant and under-five mortality rates declined significantly from 61 and 78 per 1,000 live births, respectively, to 40 and 47 per 1,000 live births due to increased coverage of primary health care (PHC) and family planning programmes. These rates are, however, still high when compared to other countries whose gross national product per capita is similar to that of the Dominican Republic. Diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections (ARI), aggravated by poverty, malnutrition and low birth weight, are among the main causes of under-five deaths. A new growing threat to child survival is HIV/AIDS, especially for 26,000 children engaged in prostitution and women; 25 per cent of AIDS cases are people under 25 years of age. The maternal mortality rate is high, estimated at 300 per 100,000 live births.

4. Progress is modest towards other goals. Water supply and basic sanitation coverage is 65 and 55 per cent, respectively, with the lowest coverage in rural and marginal urban areas. Repetition and drop-out rates, over-age students and illiteracy remain high. Multi-grade teaching is used in 60 per cent of elementary classes in rural areas. Although compulsory for 5- to 6-year-olds, coverage for early childhood education is only 23 per cent.

5. Twenty-five per cent of all families are headed by women. Violence and abuse affect women and children in one out of six Dominican families. Poverty limits access of women to basic services and employment. The Labour Code only partly prevents discrimination against women.

6. Children in especially difficult circumstances include an estimated 1.8 million street children, child labourers and those with disabilities or trapped in prostitution. About 28 per cent of teenage girls below the age of 18 years become pregnant.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

7. Effective results have been achieved through strategies that encourage involvement, participation and consensus among the different government and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners in processes that build knowledge, skills and commitment. A more developed communication and mobilization strategy could mobilize additional resources for the NPA goals. The training components were weak in planning, design and follow-up. While improvements were introduced, these areas will be further strengthened in the new country programme. Mobilization for child rights for children in especially difficult circumstances contributed to passage of the Law on the Protection of Children

and Adolescents. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be the core for the strategy of the new country programme and serve as a framework for updating the NPA strategy.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

8. The Government/UNICEF strategy meeting held in October 1995 identified some major thrusts. During the remainder of the programme formulation process, more specific country programme objectives will be identified.

9. The proposed country programme strategy will have four major thrusts: (a) to assist the Government in strengthening the social reform process and the SDP, which should lead to increased efficiency and sustainability of social services and the achievement and sustainability of the NPA goals; (b) to strengthen capacities for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and to mobilize major social groups to help implement them; (c) to support the Government, NGOs and families in accelerating and sustaining child and maternal survival gains; and (d) to improve coordination and cooperation among organizations, the Government and United Nations agencies for children and women.

10. Cross-cutting country programme strategies will include advocacy for women's and child rights and the NPA in order to generate commitment from major sectors of society. This will be accomplished by using clear, understandable objectives of the country programme as the basis for wider capacity-building and social mobilization; building participation in the country programme into a true consortium comprised of the Government, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral agencies; and linking country programme strategies to the ongoing social reform process and to the SDP. Thus, capacity-building, advocacy and empowerment will be the principal strategies, with service delivery as a secondary strategy.

11. The country programme strategy will be implemented through four interlinked programmes. The social policy and child and women's rights programme will (a) strengthen local planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes for women and children, and promote the reduction of disparities and increased participation through the Mayors as Defenders of Children Initiative and the child rights' monitoring commission (Organismo Rector); (b) enhance monitoring of the NPA goals for the year 2000; (c) advocate with the Government and multilateral partners to support social reform and the SDP, particularly advocacy for more adequate government resources for children and women; and (d) build motivation, commitment and participation through the training and supervision of government and NGO trainers to strengthen planning, implementation and evaluation.

12. The child rights' component will strengthen monitoring of compliance to the laws protecting children. UNICEF will provide technical support to Organismo Rector and strengthen partnerships with the church, NGOs, local governments, the private sector, professional societies and mass organizations. To increase public, family and government awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, UNICEF will support the development of a training package on child and women's rights for use by these groups, schools and other organizations. This initiative will require an increase in the number of trainers in child rights and the number of school committees on child rights. UNICEF also will promote interventions to protect and provide opportunities for children in especially difficult circumstances, and help to develop standards for more cost-effective services for these children.

13. The cooperation also will support the passage of legislation to improve compliance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as national efforts to monitor implementation of the Government's Plan for Women in Development, 1995-2001. Communication and educational strategies also will be developed to sensitize the public on violence against women. An evaluation of legal centres providing legal advice to poor women should provide an analysis of how this positive example can become the basis for an expansion of this service by the Government. In collaboration with partners such as the Women's Bureau, the National Planning Office, the NGO coordinating body, women's organizations and the United Nations Inter-agency Committee on Women, UNICEF will support preparation of a gender assessment and promote its use in project planning, implementation and evaluation. Similarly, UNICEF will advocate for and support gender-sensitivity training. As part of a larger Facts for Life communication initiative, UNICEF will support female literacy services, providing educational messages linked to women's and children's health in selected districts. A new initiative will be tested to promote access of poor women to credit using the Grameen Bank experience in Bangladesh as a model.

14. The objectives for health and nutrition are linked to the national goals for improved health service efficiency and effectiveness, sustaining mid-decade and achieving the decade goals. Given the limited resources of UNICEF, strengthening of inter-agency coordination and partnership with NGOs, multilateral and bilateral agencies will continue to be a strategic thrust. In the course of the programme formulation process, more specific objectives for UNICEF cooperation will be identified, which will complement the roles of other partners. UNICEF will continue to promote and strengthen inter-organizational coordination for the national expanded programme on immunization, control of diarrhoeal diseases and ARI. However, UNICEF advocacy will give greater emphasis to improvements in community health education and personnel training. UNICEF also will support health sector reform efforts, especially the decentralization of PHC services in selected districts as part of the Mayors as Defenders of Children Initiative. Within this context, the cooperation will (a) provide technical support for epidemiological surveillance at all levels and monitoring of the efficiency of cold-chain management; (b) increase in the number of ORT centres through an expansion of the network of community brigades, under a national partnership which will promote hygiene education and ORT; and (c) link services between health centres and community ORT centres. To accelerate the reduction of maternal mortality, the cooperation will support reform in hospital management of births, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, the Maternal Mortality Commission, the Dominican Social Security Institute, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), women's NGOs and selected private hospitals.

15. The programme also will promote an increase in rural water supply and sanitation coverage through policy advocacy on lower-cost technology, hygiene education, greater community participation and increased donor coordination for small water supply and sanitation systems.

16. The nutrition component will support national efforts to decrease protein-energy malnutrition through, inter alia, an increase in breast-feeding and expansion of BFHI; reduction of vitamin A and iron deficiency among preschoolers and pregnant and lactating mothers; and the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders through universal salt iodization. UNICEF will support a broader strategy for the reduction of child protein-energy malnutrition through community-based growth monitoring and nutrition education; expansion of BFHI to all public hospitals, 10 private hospitals and 10 hospitals of the Dominican Institute for Social Security; and monitoring, in collaboration with WHO/Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Vitamin A supplementation for children under three years of age and pregnant women will continue until 1998 when it will be replaced by sugar fortification. Major partners will include the

Ministry of Health, WHO/PAHO, La Roche, sugar producers, salt producers, NGOs and the Ministry of Education.

17. The strategy of the education programme will be (a) to expand the multi-grade innovated school project to 300 rural and peri-urban schools, including those of the NGO Fe y Alegría, and to use the results to explore nationwide expansion with the Government and the World Bank; (b) to apply the results to national curriculum reform and teacher-training efforts, including other donor-supported education initiatives; (c) to incorporate child rights and gender equity subjects into teacher training and curriculum development, and promote these through school committees on child rights; (d) to develop non-conventional models of early child stimulation and support a network of NGOs and volunteers from neighborhoods and parent associations; and (e) to help develop strategies to facilitate the reintegration of out-of-school children into primary school. Partnerships and the links between the Ministry of Education and key NGOs and institutions, e.g. Poveda and the Centre for Pedagogic Studies, will be cultivated.

18. A cross-cutting programme communication initiative, which will support all programmes, will address advocacy and social mobilization strategies. The reproduction of the Dominican version of the Facts for Life will continue jointly with WHO and UNFPA. Facts for Life communication will achieve sustainable nationwide coverage through primary schools and early child curricula; health education activities of hospitals and large clinics; churches, NGOs and community organizations (including Scouts, Youth Wing of the Red Cross, Christian youth associations, women organizations, and the military), and the media. The messages target children, adolescents and adults to promote healthier life styles. Communication strategies to increase awareness of the public on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women also will be pursued in coordination with the social policy and child and women's rights programme.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme cooperation, 1997-2001 a/
(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	Supplementary funds	Total
Social policy and child and women's rights	1 750	4 500	6 250
Health and nutrition	1 650	3 750	5 400
Education	1 000	1 750	2 750
Programme communication	600	-	600
Total	5 000	10 000	15 000

a/ These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.